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### Effectively Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation

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## Chapter 8

# Effectively Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation

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### ABSTRACT

*This is the call for teacher preparation programs to actively incorporate an emphasis on social justice education and the development of teachers committed to creating equitable schools. Education in today's multicultural, pluralistic society must be actively concentrated on and successful at creating more just and unbiased schools for underserved students. Similar to Ladson-Billings' argument for a redefining of 'good teaching,' there must be a redefinition of that which constitutes social justice teaching. It is the role of today's teacher preparation programs to equip teachers with the essential skills necessary to develop students, manage bias, and create a culture of equity for all. Particularly as it relates to the education, understanding, cultivation, and development of all students in the K-12 school system, a required component of every teacher preparation program must be an increased focus on teaching that is comprehensive, socially just, and impartial.*

### THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

*White Americans increasingly reject racial injustice in principle, but remain reluctant to accept the measures necessary to eliminate the injustice. –Pettigrew, 1979*

Every year, in the United States of America, more than 1,300 institutions of higher academic learning – public and private colleges and universities, as well as alternative programs offered by individual districts, states, and other federal entities – prepare and graduate a burgeoning class of teachers for induction into the K-12 educational space. Much divergence exists between these programs, including core elements directly related to their very design, program dissemination, and implementation, as well as in the palatability of teacher preparation. Furthermore, teacher education programs are often prescribed by state regulation, accreditation standards, or the limited number of credits available. For this reason, it is much more likely for programs to directly address issues on which the students will be tested – primarily as

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it pertains to mathematics and English language arts instruction. This is especially true as educational leaders continue to measure the quality of schools and, through value-added assessments, the value of schools and colleges of education on the basis of standardized, summative test scores. In regions serving urban populations, where colleges supply a large number of teachers for a particular system, there is pressure to focus on the adopted curriculum in areas to be measured at the expense of all else. Especially pertinent to students and families in urban regions is this: an overemphasis on classroom management and instruction directly relates to an under-emphasis on cultural diversity, student development, and primarily, on the increasingly important implementation of anti-bias curriculum.

The diversification of the population of school-age children in the U.S. continues to increase; yet, the pool of potential teachers does not, furthering the need to prepare educators to work with students who fundamentally differ from themselves. A millennial report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy in collaboration with Michigan State University (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) found the persistent disparity between teachers, students, families, and the adjoining communities they serve to be a pervasive reality. More recent studies include the work of collaborators at the New York and Washington, D.C. Centers for Social and Emotional Education, along with the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). As a result of this study, researchers found ‘significant gaps’ between school climate research and teacher education. Given the fact that “school climate is a relatively recent focus of interest, it is not surprising that many teacher educators are unaware of contemporary work in this area and [it] is not part of teacher education programs or standards for such programs” (Cohen, et al., 2009, p. 202). A prime factor in managing bias in teacher preparation is the work involved in reducing the gap between school culture, climate, and teacher readiness for the multicultural school environment. Formerly viewed by educational institutions as a supplemental activity, advocacy in education has become an absolute necessity in promoting a positive, holistic school culture and climate. Teachers are now called upon to do more than simply translate curricular material; in this multicultural, pluralistic society, today’s teachers must be an instructive and educational advocate, infusing the tenets of social justice into the curriculum. Teacher preparation programs serve as a fundamental first step in training educators to become active agents of change, betterment, and social justice. This important work can only occur once the educational leaders who are charged with developing teacher preparation programs make the intentional effort to design curriculum, construct syllabi, and develop coursework that continually reinforces the role of educators in serving as active agents of equity and equality in and beyond the four walls of the school building.

### **Advocacy as a Necessity to Managing Bias**

Public education in the U.S. continues to undergo significant transformations. At the present time, a number of states are elucidating their procedures regarding Common Core and new Learning Standards, all while implementing a host of ongoing assessments in the effort to measure and report summative progress. Additionally, educational agencies are currently awaiting the full implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law on December 10, 2015, while concurrently anticipating updates regarding the state of sweeping, revamped higher educational regulations for colleges and universities (Hodge and Welch, 2016). Moreover, states are currently engaged in the revision of Equity Plans and working to eliminate the Honesty Gap in data reporting to ensure that every child in the U.S. has a viable opportunity to be successful. The educational space is vast, and the call to do and be more is

prodigious. Given the innumerable challenges that abound in improving teacher education programs and practices in the U.S., the presence of a qualified teaching force is and must continue to be an indubitable necessity. There remains much disproportionality between the demographic of teachers as compared to their clients – their students; it is for this very reason that immediate improvements must be made in order to build the qualified consortium of teachers that the educational system is so desperately lacking. To this extent, teacher preparation programs must go above and beyond traditional educator training. The work involved in managing bias must include regular self-reflection and interminable professional development. It is imperative that teacher preparation programs are designed in such a way as to include these critical tenets for personal and professional growth and development. The qualified, high-quality educator is the one who views self-improvement and bias management as primary factors in promoting the efficacy of the professional learning community.

Overwhelmingly, practitioners in the K-12 educational sphere have articulated serious concerns about the essentiality of training and experience in multicultural education for teachers in culturally diverse classrooms, with a majority of stakeholders underscoring the necessity of training in multicultural education for teachers (Sharma, 2011). Olstad, Foster, and Wyman (1983) acknowledged that teachers lacking multicultural education are inadequately prepared for the reality of a multi-ethnic, pluralistic society and tend to have generally low expectations for children from minority groups. Inasmuch as this is directly relevant to teacher preparation programs, to what extent, then, do education programs fully prepare culturally adept, competent teachers, capable of being sensitive to the varied needs of their students?

Derman-Sparks (1989) offers the following description for anti-bias curriculum:

*It (anti-bias curriculum) is an active/activist approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and the 'isms.' In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism, and handicappism, it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression. (p. 3)*

Multicultural education is not merely an ethnic issue; because teaching is a multiracial experience, this is an issue that affects every member of the constituency. Furthermore, it is not enough to view multicultural education as an extra-curricular activity. It is an essential component of responsible teacher preparation, and it must be regarded, approached, and assessed in this same manner. As a matter of fact, it is worth mentioning that within the next few decades, the U.S. will rely on minorities, immigrants, and white women for 90 percent of its workforce (Quality Education for Minorities Project, 1990).

A primary task of the teacher educator is to ensure that the program curriculum is designed in such a way as to holistically prepare instructors with the necessary tools to address the needs of the whole child, both individually and collectively. An incomplete program is one in which teachers graduate with the singular goal of instructing students. Instructional leadership, albeit a very important component in teacher preparation, is only one of many elements that comprise the educational space. Given the increasing diversity of the educational sphere, teacher educators must be aware of the degree to which their teacher preparation programs efficiently meet the following requirements:

1. Facilitating increased cultural self-awareness,
2. Cultivating appreciation of diversity,
3. Increasing cultural competency, and

4. Preparing teachers to work effectively with a variety of students and parents (Lin, Lake, and Rice, 2008, p. 196).

Teachers' own personal beliefs are bound to impact and influence their teaching practices. For this reason, the implementation of a diversity curriculum can be further impeded by the discomfort, uncertainty, or even fear that many teachers and teacher educators face. In many instances, it is the educators themselves who potentially become the very barriers that prevent the successful integration of anti-bias curricula (Van Hook, 2002). Nevertheless, this nation simply cannot afford the ethical, social, and moral repercussions that would result in and from the miseducation of such a large sector of the population (Chisholm, 1994).

### **The Role of Advocacy in Public Education**

The effective educator is the one who commits to engaging in the ongoing practice of intentional reflection, eager to identify and assess the successes and shortcomings that occur as they impact the quality of students' instructional experiences. This work includes, but is not limited to: *focusing* on the employment of best practices, *connecting* the bridge that links theory to practice, *assessing* the innovations undertaken in increasing technological implementations in the classroom, as well as *analyzing* summative, end-of-course and end-of-year student growth data measures. There is an embedded confidence that comes with the knowledge that one's students are equipped with a myriad of relevant skills, and that the various experiences they share in the classroom afford them with the capability to become self-reflective, critical thinkers, primed for continued growth. It is in and through this process that the well-equipped educator is able to look forward, with a discerning eye, to the future of education in the classroom as well as in this nation at large. The constant state of flux in our system is a concern, in that it directly affects the quality of every student's education in this country (Sawchuk, 2014). Thus, it is the educator's responsibility to address these needs through the call for advocacy. A foundational element in promoting advocacy in education is the role of teacher preparation programs in producing graduates who view themselves as both teachers and activists.

As the course of education evolves, continued collaboration and a collective spirit of unity remain crucial factors. As professionals, educators are called upon to embrace a growth mindset – thoughtfully, deliberately, and unequivocally striving to make education reform a priority. Educators must continue to collaborate in the effort to create a culture that truly values education while mitigating bias. Consequently, given the scope of sweeping educational change and reform in the last several years, the decline of enrollment in teacher preparation programs across the nation is not surprising. In his article, “Steep drops seen in teacher-prep enrollment numbers,” Stephen Sawchuk (2014) notes that “massive changes to the profession, coupled with budget woes, appear to be shaking the image of teaching as a stable, engaging career” (p. 1). With little incentive to enter into a sphere that many agree is more emotionally rewarding than financially lucrative, teaching is a difficult sell. Unfortunately, with more baby boomers reaching retirement age, along with veteran teachers who have had their fill of policy changes opting to leave before retirement, the educational field is currently facing an inevitable shortage of quality teachers. As noted by Clark (2014), “the loss of experience, expertise and the emotional toll on children and their parents will be felt in the near future if districts and states are unable to attract and retain highly qualified candidates now” (p. 1). This critical issue, training and retaining qualified, high-quality teach-

ers, is further compounded by the lack of practical preparation programs infused with curricula that are focused on and entrenched in self-reflection and bias management.

## **Advocacy Is a Shared Responsibility in Managing Bias**

The complexities involved in this work and the shared vision of public education are often misunderstood by the public at large as well as by policy makers and implementers. Advocacy, however, is a shared responsibility, as it allows for unity in the communal voice and offers the opportunity for change-makers to create an indelible impact on the forward, progressive work of bias management (Amabile et al., 2001; Jeong and Choi, 2015; Mailhot, Gagnon, Langley, & Binette, 2014). It is imperative for all educators to be mindful of opportunities – present and future – to speak up, to speak out, to become involved, and to be heard. It goes without saying that the dedication and energy required for this profession are virtually immeasurable. This work, the toil involved in reaching and teaching every student, is all-consuming, emotionally draining and often thankless. It requires countless hours of planning, preparation, reflection, and collaboration, in classrooms as well as in professional learning communities (PLCs) (Mailhot et al., 2014). It involves supporting student learning through ongoing professional development opportunities and shared leadership experiences. Yet far too often, the general public fails to understand what this labor truly entails. Consequently, it must be the educator's goal to commit to being more visible and more vocal by creating shared stories from the classroom. Only those with an inside view, those who understand the day-to-day elements involved in teaching and learning, can share an honest vision of the collective needs of today's students. If the true objective is to extend the educator's reach and impact change, then advocacy, on behalf of today's students, is an essential reality. This provides all the more reason for those given the task of creating teacher preparation programs to construct the curricula in such a way as to infuse bias management as a necessary component of the agenda, interwoven into the very fabric of the curricular design (Jeong and Choi, 2015).

Advocacy begins with deliberately making the choice to speak with intent. It begins with the sharing of impactful, meaningful stories, and with the ownership of one's own successes and failures. It is only then in which people will truly listen, which is precisely why this must begin during the teacher preparation process. What educators have to say is compelling, for it directly involves the children who make up the very future of this nation. Every day, young minds are being shaped and prepared for careers that may not yet exist, a notion that is awe-inspiring, to say the least. Consider the number of lives the average teacher has touched in his/her career thus far. There are very few professions in which this boundless level of impact can be attained. Designers of teacher preparation programs must continue seeking ways to foster conversations about this profession that give credence to the efforts and work at creating a culture in which education is valued, differing cultures are celebrated, and PLCs are the norm and not the exception (Mailhot et al., 2014). The propensity to create a space that is both intrinsically and extrinsically motivating and rewarding for all learners is of primary value. The expectation of the teacher is inordinate – to incite learning, to inspire emerging educators to take risks that promote growth, to serve as role models and foster collaborative and critical thinking that will prepare this nation's students for academic and personal success. This charge involves the active work of the teacher preparation program designers and coordinators to ameliorate any and all antithetical elements. Forging partnerships with community stakeholders, policy makers, and local teaching colleges, creating alignments that fully support education and learning, are just a few of the many components that must already be imbued in

this space (Amabile et al., 2001). Giving voice to the needs of students must begin with providing them with high-quality teachers who are well-equipped for the many proclivities of the educational space.

## **The Essentiality of Well-Prepared Teachers for Student Learning and Achievement**

The widely-accepted premise that teachers make a difference in the lives of their students is a concept that is difficult to dispute. Over half a century ago, one report, in particular (Coleman, Katz, & Menzel, 1966), fleetingly shed doubt on the direct impact of teachers on student achievement. Findings seemed to indicate that the impact of teachers and the quality of teaching were less significant to student learning and achievement than other factors, such as students' family background and socioeconomic status. However, since that time, continued, subsequent research in classrooms continues to demonstrate that teachers do make a tangible and indelible difference in student academic performance and achievement. Variegation in student achievement, for example, has been systematically related to variations in the classroom behaviors of teachers (Good, London, & Bledsoe, 1975). Connected to these findings, King and Newman (2000) state, "since teachers have the most direct, sustained contact with students and considerable control over what is taught and the climate for learning, improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions through professional development is a critical step in improving student achievement" (p. 44). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 1996) and other national groups, such as the Education Trust (1998), also reached similar conclusions based on research in which the academic achievement of individual students was tracked over long periods of time (Sanders and Rivers, 1996). Further, all of these aforementioned organizations have evidenced that well-qualified teachers, high-quality teaching, and an emphasis on equity and equality in education can effectively and impactfully close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers.

It has become increasingly imperative to scrutinize the veracity of the conclusion that well-prepared teachers and high-quality teaching matter, more so than has previously been perceived. It is also important to research, document, and recognize the specificity of teacher characteristics, the school climate and culture in which they serve, and how these concomitant factors contribute to elevated student outcomes. This information continues to prove useful in determining how to better educate and support teachers in diversifying, modifying, and reinforcing a positive and educationally-rich classroom environment. Undoubtedly, high-quality teaching is indispensable to success in student learning; thus, there is a direct link between the specific characteristics of teachers and the academic accomplishments and achievements of students. The information that can be derived from these accompanying elements may very well be utilized to contend against a recent trend in many districts toward the watering down of requirements for teacher education and certification as a result of teacher shortages, class-size reductions, and growing K-12 student populations. These factors continue to influence the quality of K-12 teachers, the craft of teaching, and as a result, student achievement.

The general public continues to recognize the importance of high-quality, well-prepared, unprejudiced teachers. In a large national survey of *Public Attitudes Toward Teaching, Educational Opportunity, and School Reform*, Haselkorn and Harris (1998) reported that "roughly nine out of ten Americans believe the best way to lift student achievement is to ensure a qualified teacher in every classroom" (p. 1). In addition, survey results revealed a strong and uniformly held belief by the public that prospective teachers require special training and skills, not simply a good general education. Contemporaneously, public



opinion overwhelmingly favors “ensuring a well-qualified teacher in every classroom” (Haselkorn & Harris, 1998, p. 2) as the educational system’s top priority. Indeed, teachers – once viewed as central to the problem of student underachievement – are now being recognized as central to the solution. In teacher preparation, there exists a ‘multiplier effect’ that can span from one generation to the next. Inasmuch as a sound, solid education is vital to producing the next generation of leaders, it is equally substantial in preparing the very teachers who will produce said leaders. The common refrain, “you can’t teach what you don’t know,” (National Science Board, 1999, p. 2) is certainly applicable, in that, only those teachers who are prepared to embrace and advocate for a culture of change, multiculturalism and diversity will be equipped to prepare their students accordingly.

## **The Evidence That High-Quality Teaching Matters**

Before further discussing the various aspects of teacher quality and the ongoing effort to manage bias in teacher preparation as well as in practice, it is imperative to acknowledge and to emphasize that there are countless thousands of teachers who do excellent jobs in helping their students learn and achieve, often in the midst of very difficult circumstances and at relatively low pay. Creating a climate and culture of support and acceptance regardless of differences in culture and socioeconomic status is sure to be a feat for any teacher. The gap that currently exists in teacher preparation programs is such that these concerns are often not addressed until after a teacher has entered the classroom setting. Though it is essential to make recommendations for addressing these concerns, it is even more crucial to note that the intention is not to paint all teachers with the same, cookie-cutter brush. Indeed, a primary factor in preparing teachers for both classroom and bias management can be attributed to preparation and continuing professional development that directly meets the needs and demands of new approaches to teaching and learning in today’s institutions of learning. All stakeholders who are concerned about and impacted by the quality of education must actively and carefully consider adopting policies and practices that encourage the most qualified individuals to prepare for, enter, and remain in the educational environment. This includes teaching, revamping, and jettisoning those practices that dissuade or impede them from doing so. A chief element in preparing and equipping teachers for the classroom is replacing former practices, often indirect in the dealing and handling of a variety of students from differing backgrounds, with practices that directly and actively confront prejudice and partiality. In recent years, a number of large-scale studies regarding teaching (Ferguson, 1991; Ferguson, Ladd & Ladd, 1996; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) have elucidated just how much teacher quality makes a difference in the achievement of students. The implications, though numerous, all highlight the central role of teacher preparation programs in arming teachers with the necessary tools to create an equitable classroom environment for all students.

## **The Connection Between Teacher Preparation and Bias Management**

A plethora of evidence continues to exist, stressing the notion that the qualifications of teachers not only matter in student achievement but also are major variables in improving student learning and achievement (King & Newman, 2000; National Research Council, 2000; Sparks and Hirsh, 2000; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). For well over 15 years, Sanders and his colleagues have analyzed data associated with the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), assessing annual, summative tests distributed to 3rd-8th-grade students in the state of Tennessee. This data was used to identify and examine students’ performance in mathematics, science, reading, language, and social studies. Utilizing

a database of more than 5 million records, Sanders and his colleagues have tracked individual students longitudinally and studied each child's academic achievement on a year-by-year basis. In this way, they have been able to identify specific years in which a child makes average progress, exceeds average progress, or achieves no gain in progress. Sanders and Rivers (1996), in a study intended to gauge the residual and cumulative effects of teacher qualifications on student achievement, gathered test and achievement data for a cohort of students from the time they were second-graders through the time in which they completed fifth grade. By disaggregating the data, they were able to see the impact of quality teaching on each child over time (Sanders and Rivers, 1996). Throughout the course of their study, the authors reported that student achievement at each grade level correlated positively and directly with the quality of the teachers who taught those students. Correspondingly, the researchers discovered significant residual, unintended effects, in that they found that the individual children they studied tended not to convalesce after a school year's worth of classroom experience with an ineffective teacher. In the vast majority of those instances, direct correlations could be made between the ability of the teacher to manage self, to manage the classroom, and to objectively and professionally impart instruction.

Conversely, a child who spent one year with a highly effective teacher, one equipped with the tools to handle the societal environment of the classroom space, tended to experience academic benefits even upwards of two years later. In this as well as in other comparable studies, researchers have continually shown that placing students in classrooms with high-quality teaching does matter. At the onset of this study, the researchers did not define teacher quality a priori. Rather they sought to identify 'quality' teachers based on how well students achieved throughout the course of a given school year. The Tennessee achievement tests were used as a measure to determine if and how the students in a particular teacher's class achieved a normal year of growth in various core subject matter fields such as English Language Arts, mathematics, social studies/humanities, and science. This data was then utilized to assess student growth in relation to the expectation of a normal year's academic growth. Using these criteria, they then identified teachers as 'below average quality,' 'average quality,' or 'above average quality.' Results indicate that variables such as the racial and ethnic composition of schools, students' socioeconomic levels, and the mean achievement of an entire school population correlated far less with student achievement when compared to the variable of teacher quality and the teacher's ability to embrace and teach to these abovementioned elements.

In a large-scale study of younger children in grades 3-5, Sanders, Wright, and Horn (1997) found that "teacher effects are dominant factors affecting student academic gain," across the board, and in all core content subject areas. In a 1991 study, Ferguson examined 900 out of 1,000 school districts in Texas, investigating class size, student scores on standardized tests in reading and mathematics, and teacher qualifications. The teacher qualifications examined in these same districts included years of teaching experience, teacher performance on the Texas state teacher examinations, and teachers' acquisition of advanced (master's) degrees (The critical importance of well-prepared teachers for student learning and achievement, n.d.). Ferguson (1991) found that the following teacher qualifications, listed in order from most to least important, had statistically significant effects on student scores: teacher language scores on the state examination, class size, years of teaching experience, and the earning of an advanced degree (The critical importance of well-prepared teachers for student learning and achievement, n.d.). According to a review of the study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (cited in Sparks and Hirsh, 2000), teacher expertise, as defined by Ferguson, explained roughly 40 percent of the variance in the students' achievement in reading and mathematics. Subsequently, Ferguson and Ladd (1996) used Sanders' statistical approach to study nearly 30,000 fourth graders in Alabama during the

1990-91 school year. Their findings indicated that students' test scores in mathematics and reading were positively and directly impacted by two teacher variables: above average scores on the American College Testing program's college entrance examination and completion of at least one master's degree (The critical importance of well-prepared teachers for student learning and achievement, n.d.). Given that teachers have the most sustained, direct contact with students and substantial control over the culture and climate of learning, improving teachers' knowledge, skill, dispositions, and bias potentiality through professional development is a critical step in improving overall student performance and achievement (King and Newman, 2000).

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Teacher preparation programs should provide insight into how teacher candidates view their roles in a diverse classroom and prepare these novice teachers to become reflective practitioners (Rodriguez & Caplan, 1998). According to the Southern Regional Education Board (1994), all prospective and respective teacher candidates should have formal training in child development, language acquisition, appropriate instructional and assessment techniques, curricular development, parent involvement, and cultural sensitivity. In addition, as Horn (2003) posits, emphasis should be placed on appropriate classroom methodology for teaching content to young children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As teachers and educationalists, it is imperative that we actively and advertently prepare all budding and current educators, whether majority or minority, to provide a high-quality education to and on behalf of all students. Current research in the field "demonstrates that traditional field experiences are often disconnected from coursework, focused on a narrow range of teaching skills, and reinforce the status quo" (Wilson et al., 2001). This provides all the more reason for the implementation and integration of pedagogically sound, high-quality experiences that provide teachers with the tools necessary to develop insight in the field, to reflect on best practices, and to continually revise and revamp applied instruction. Notwithstanding, education is *the* field in which people-turned-teachers are trained and primed to enter into the real world; one in which they must be ready for "the social, political and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters" (Sims, 1983, p. 43). This preparation is not to be seen as an addition to the teacher's entrenched role as instructor, classroom manager, and leader. Rather, this preparation is as indispensable to the craft of teaching as cultivation is to one's own human growth and development.

## **Teachers and Parents as Shared Stakeholders**

In this same vein, it has become increasingly essential for teachers and parents to view themselves as shared stakeholders and partners in developing and promoting student capacity (Lin, Lake, and Rice, 2008, p. 196). As such, schools and districts nationwide are acknowledging effective family engagement as a primary component of educational transformation efforts. Coupled with the growing evidence that points directly to the benefits of family engagement, this increased responsiveness by school and district leaders has been ignited by the growing number of federal and state policies including family engagement as a requisite of school and district reform. A synthesis of the research evidence conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) asserts that students with highly engaged families:

### ***Effectively Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation***

- Attend school regularly
- Have stronger social skills
- Earn higher grades
- Graduate from high school
- Go on to college or other postsecondary programs

Concomitant with the research evidence illuminating the fact that families are central to improving schools and increasing student achievement, is the very limited time allotted to teachers for instruction and learning in the school setting. Teachers must rely on a very short supply of instructional time to complete all of the work needed to ensure students learn and achieve to their highest potential. Research shows that children spend only 20% of their waking time annually in formal classroom education, leaving 80% of their time to explore and enhance their learning interests in non-school settings (Harvard Family Research Project, 2013). These two connected, and very important factors further elucidate the need for strong and mutually beneficial family and school partnerships.

A successful approach to family engagement is one in which families and schools are intentionally and systematically interconnected to meet the prodigious responsibility of educating the nation's children. Transforming the way schools and districts collaborate with families requires a new mindset about the nature and purpose of said partnerships. Additionally, it also requires some systemic adjustments that allow for improved capacity and new cultures to emerge.

This includes the following (Henderson and Mapp, 2002):

- School and district leaders must turn to research and evidence-based engagement practices that are intentionally designed to bring teachers and families together as learners and collaborators. A team approach is at the center of adult learning and family engagement.
- School leaders need to provide regular professional learning opportunities that help reshape the hearts and minds of teachers in order to foster meaningful collaboration with families. Families can be our best allies.
- The notion of students mastering grade level learning concepts through at home practice must be embedded in the fabric of teaching and learning and be a key component of the school and district improvement plans. With high impact family engagement practices, home can be a rich and stimulating learning environment that supports classroom instruction.
- A systemic and integrated approach to family engagement must be established that is linked to learning, developmental, relational and collaborative. The time families spend interacting with teachers and school leaders must yield clear direction for effective ways to engage in supporting student learning.

For students, families are a continuing presence, while schools are shorter-term resources. This challenges schools to focus beyond their boundaries and recognize the importance of what happens at home. Henderson and Mapp (2002) suggest, for example, that school staff should focus on supporting families to communicate with their children and support their work in school. Williams (1998) concludes that parent involvement programs “should be designed to increase the ways that fathers and mothers interact with their sons and daughters about academic achievement [for] parents are an untapped resource and their parent-child interactions can be altered to enhance in-school performance” (p. 10).

## CONCLUSION

The ongoing challenge for leaders in teacher preparation is to create social and political spaces for all advocates and stakeholders to productively function and vigorously engage – inside and outside of the school building – in deliberately and explicitly promoting activism, intellectualism, and social justice (Pignatelli, 1993). Despite the fact that Dewey is criticized for his “largely uncritical treatment of science in the service of social progress and democracy” (Pignatelli, 1993, p. 14), as educational visionaries, we must demand from ourselves, that we do not leave or produce “educational outcomes [which] mirror and safeguard longstanding societal disparities” (Bogotch, 2000, p. 147). Social justice leadership is what good leadership should aspire towards. Likewise, taking up the charge of ensuring impartiality and fairness for all is an essential component of social justice leadership. Consequently, championing the needs of students who have been historically marginalized is a central premise of the growing call for social justice leadership (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). A central tenet of social justice leadership is that school leaders must act as advocates in their schools and communities and, especially, as advocates for the needs of marginalized students (Anderson, 2009; Powers & Hermans, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). It takes more than what has traditionally been understood as good leadership to achieve greater equity (Theoharis, 2007); the challenge, then, is to take what has already been established as “good” leadership and reframe this concept into leadership for social justice. This is the call for teacher preparation programs that are centered on enacting social justice, and leadership that creates equitable schools. Teacher preparation that is not actively concentrated on and successful at creating more just and equitable schools for underserved students is incomplete (Theoharis, 2007). Similar to Ladson-Billings’ (1995) argument for a redefining of ‘good teaching,’ there must be a redefinition of that which constitutes social justice teaching. In the ongoing effort to manage bias in teacher preparation, particularly as it relates to the education, understanding, cultivation, and development of all students in the K-12 school system, what is necessary, and what is good, is socially just leadership.

In *The getting of wisdom: What critically reflective teaching is and why it’s important* (Brookfield, 1995), educators are called upon to get back to identifying that which is primary in teaching, instruction, learning, and education:

*We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act towards each other, and to their environment, with compassion, understanding, and fairness. But our attempts to increase the amount of love and justice in the world are never simple, never ambiguous. What we think are democratic, respectful ways of treating people can be experienced by them as oppressive and constraining. One of the hardest things teachers learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice. The cultural, psychological, and political complexities of learning and the ways in which power complicates all human relationships (including those between students and teachers) means that teaching can never be innocent. (p. 1)*

Therefore, educators must be prepared and equipped to take an active role in raising awareness, promoting relevant social justice discourse, and taking a stand against bias and prejudice. Finally, if the core mission of every teacher preparation program is “to prepare teacher candidates to integrate anti-bias or diversity curriculum with the regular curriculum” (Van Hook, 2002), then it is imperative that this work commences immediately.

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## **KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Anti-Bias Curriculum:** An activist approach to educational curricula which attempts to challenge prejudices such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, and other forms of connecting social systems built on domination, oppression, and submission.

**Common Core Learning Standards:** A clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level, designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to take credit-bearing introductory courses in two- or four-year college programs or enter the workforce.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):** The ESSA, signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, is a bipartisan measure to reauthorize the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students.

**Equity Plans:** Statewide initiatives, issued by the U.S. Department of Education, that include Equity Profile resources and data – this profile provides a summary of key publicly available data and a large data file that brings together several public data sources that a State may consider using in its State plan.



**Honesty Gap:** The discrepancy between the percentages of students that some states reported as “proficient” and the number of students truly qualified to meet proficiency requirements according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), widely regarded as the “Nation’s Report Card”.

**Multicultural Education:** Any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds.

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):** A group of educators who meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.

**Value-Added Assessment:** A method of analyzing test data, intended to measure teaching and learning. Based on a review of students’ test score gains from previous grades, researchers can predict the amount of growth those students are likely to make in a given year.

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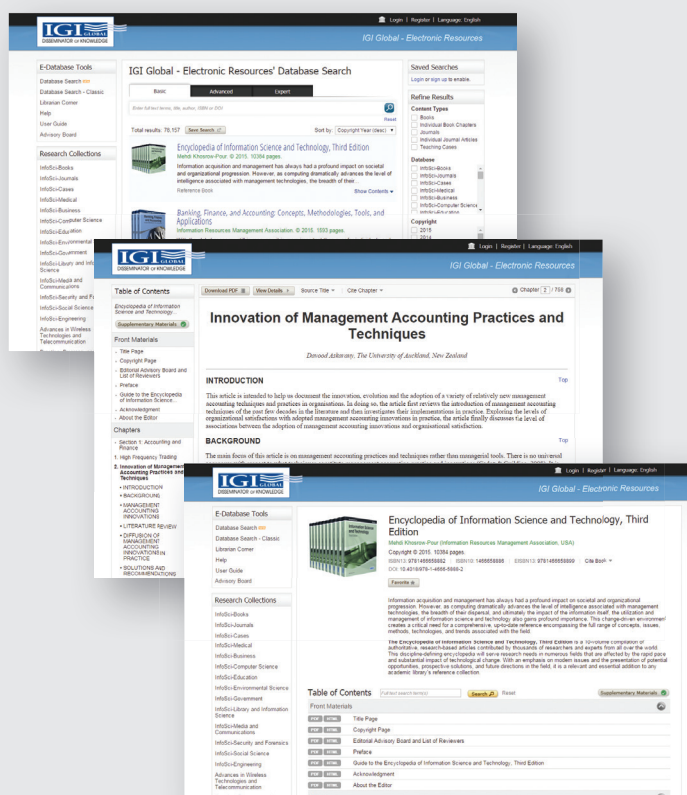
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